

43-1107

Post's APB 93

Trade Center Bombing, seek 'Clarity of Motive'

Approved For Release 2000/08/10 : CIA-RDP96-00789R003900230005-0

Ryder employees, had arrived at the office and claimed van had been stolen the night before. He asked for his \$400 damage deposit, but was told he must file a police report.

Salameh's name was already in the files. In 1990 he had demonstrated publicly on behalf of El-Sayyid Nosair, an Islamic firebrand who had been charged with, and acquitted of, the 1991 slaying of Jewish Defense League founder Meir Kahane. Salameh had visited Nosair at the prison in Attica, N.Y., where he was serving a sentence on lesser charges.

Salameh gave investigators a potential suspect to consider, and, as important, drew their attention to a group of activists who orbited around the larger Islamic community in New York and New Jersey. He attended the Abu Bakr mosque in Brooklyn and the Al-Salam mosque in Jersey City. Rahman had worshipped at both mosques.

The FBI had not previously considered these activists to be merely passionate militants. Yet they had access to intelligence information about them gathered as a result of at least three occurrences: the prosecution of Nosair; emergence of Rahman as a presence in the New Jersey-New York Islamic community; and the 1991 murder of Mustafa Shalabi.

The Nosair trial was a watershed moment among Middle Eastern militants in New York. Kahane, a hero to many Jewish radicals, was viewed as a symbol of Zionist oppression to Islamic radicals. During the trial, the two groups staged demonstrations on opposite sides of the court-

ment blames the Islamic Group for a series of bombings and murders, most especially the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981.

Egyptian security forces are engaged in a massive, nationwide crackdown aimed at fundamentalist militants, including members of the Islamic Group. The government has jailed 700 suspected extremists in response to a wave of violence that has left nearly 150 people dead, at the hands of either police or extremists.

Before he emigrated to the United States, Rahman was acquitted of involvement in Sadat's death, but an FBI intelligence briefing during the Persian Gulf War persuaded at least one senior official to believe that he posed a potentially serious threat from his new base in New Jersey.

When Rahman arrived in the United States, Shalabi found him a residence. Thereafter, they raised funds for the Afghan resistance, but ultimately had a falling out, according to published statements by several associates. In March 1991, Shalabi was found dead in his Brooklyn home, shot and knifed. There have been no arrests.

In addition, five months before the trade center bombing, about 20 members of the two mosques who attended Nosair's trial or visited him at Attica were subpoenaed by a federal grand jury, according to the New York Times. Ahmed A. Satta, a postal worker, told the Times that FBI agents grilled him about Nosair, Shalabi and Rahman.

To officials, then, the circumstantial clues being gathered by agents in New Jersey seemed to fit into a larger context. For example, Salameh's New York state driver's license listed his residence as 57 Prospect Park, S.W. Brooklyn—the home of Ibrahim

WORLD TRADE CENTER BOMBING SUSPECTS

Six suspects have been charged in connection with the World Trade Center bombing. Four were jointly indicted in the bombing and remain in custody. One is being held on obstruction charges and the sixth reportedly has fled the country.

MOHAMMAD SALAMEH, 25

Jordanian.
Jersey City, N.J.,
handyman
arrested March
4. Indicted in the
bombing.

NIDAL AYYAD, 25

Kuwaiti.
Maplewood, N.J.,
chemical engineer
arrested
March 10.
Indicted in the
bombing.

MAHMUD ABOUHALIMA, 33

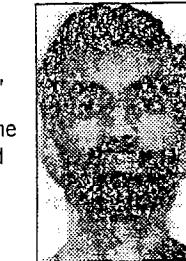
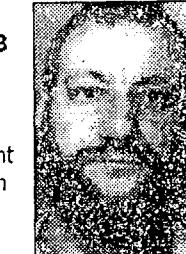
Egyptian. Woodbridge, N.J., cab driver arrested in Egypt and brought to the U.S. March 24. Indicted in the bombing.

BILAL ALKAISI, 26

Jordanian.
New York area
resident arrested
March 25.
Charged with
aiding and
abetting the
bombing.

IBRAHIM ELGABROWNY, 42

Held Iraqi passport. Brooklyn contractor arrested March 4. Charged with obstruction and possessing fraudulent passports.



SOURCE: News services and staff reports

—Compiled by Barbara J. Saffir

THE WASHINGTON POST

office, agents arrested him. In his pockets, they found the business card of Nidal Ayyad, 25, a chemical engineer.

Eventually, the FBI executed at least 10 search warrants in New Jersey.

Agents found evidence connecting Salameh to a rental unit at the Space Station Storage facility in Jersey City. Employees identified Salameh as the man who rented a shed in November under the name "Kamal Ibrahim."

Upon searching this unit March 5, agents discovered several hundred pounds of chemicals that, if properly combined and triggered with a small explosive, could produce a powerful blast. They also discovered that the chemicals—hundreds of pounds of urea and nitric acid—were purchased in November by "Kamal Ibrahim."

Storage facility employees told the FBI that the day before the bombing they saw a man they believe was

Ayyad's office phone. Agents learned that Salameh and Ayyad had a joint account at a local bank. They discovered that on Feb. 15 Ayyad had rented from National Car Rental the same type of car that Salameh arrived in at the Ryder van rental office. Moreover, "Salameh" was listed as an additional driver on the rental car. A witness from the Ryder office identified Ayyad as the same man who accompanied Salameh when he rented the van.

On March 10 agents descended on Ayyad's first-floor apartment at 60 Boyden Ave., Maplewood, N.J. Inside, they found what a prosecutor later described as a modified timing mechanism that an explosives expert described as a time delay firing system. Ayyad was carrying an American Express card in the name of Bilal Alkiasi. At least one witness told the FBI he had seen Alkiasi accompany Salameh to the storage shed "on several occasions."

Aside from these characterizations of Abouhalima—which will likely be contested in court—there has been no public disclosure of what direct evidence, if any, connects him to the bombing. He was eventually returned to New York. U.S. officials have refused to discuss their knowledge of the arrest or treatment of Abouhalima.

For weeks, the trade center bombing was an incomplete act of terrorism because it lacked a political message. But on March 28 the New York Times published a letter it received four days after the bombing. The Times quoted a law enforcement source who said there was "incontro-

Approved For Release 2000/08/10 : CIA-RDP96-00789R003900230005-0